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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the perceptions of 64 Australian teachers concerning school-based curriculum development (SBCD). The survey revealed that teachers were generally positive towards their participation in SBCD, both in terms of particular outcomes and overall. They viewed SBCD as beneficial for students, but were concerned about the conflicting demands on time. The more strongly a person or group was perceived to think teachers ought to participate in SBCD, the more likely their wishes were to be complied with. The most influential in this area was the principal, then other colleagues, and then nonprofessionals. Respondents' ratings of nine personal attributes in terms of the extent to which they constituted an aid or barrier to their participation in SBCD revealed that the only skill identified was that of working with others, and the only specific knowledge item was subject knowledge. Respondents indicated that organizational attributes (such as principal support and staff expertise) generally assisted them to participate in SBCD, except for the problem of available time. The study concludes that in the early days of SBCD, teachers did not feel free to develop curricula because of their initial lack of training, skills, and expertise but now their attitudes are becoming more positive. (Contains 26 references.) (JDD)

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BEING FREE AND FEELING FREE: PRIMARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATION IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT.

Michael Bezzina: Catholic Education Office, Parramatta

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BEING FREE AND FEELING FREE: PRIMARY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATION IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT.

Michael Bezzina: Catholic Education Office, Parramatta

There is presently a massive movement towards central control over curriculum at both National and State levels in Australia. At least part of the rationale for this movement includes claims about teachers' reactions to the responsibilities they undertook as participants in school based curriculum development (SBCD). For example, Excellence and Equity (NSW Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs, 1989:17) refers to the "major unwanted burden" which participation in SBCD might constitute. Certainly, were one to take the findings of the research of the late 1970s and early 1980s as a basis, one could be forgiven for thinking that teachers really did not want to participate in SBCD in many cases. However, it needs to be noted that that early research was limited by the lack of an overarching conceptual framework in many instances, being largely descriptive. Moreover, the period since 1984 has been marked by a paucity of research into teacher participation in SBCD, as it became a less "fashionable" issue. In order to address these shortcomings, this paper attempts to present a current description of the perceptions of one group of teachers within an articulated conceptual framework.

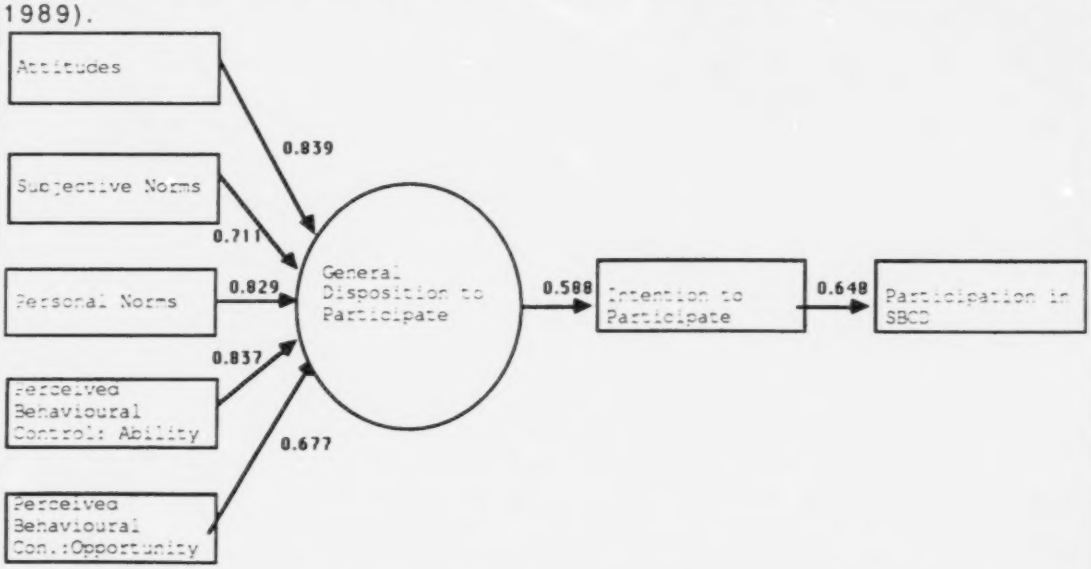
The assertion of Clark and Yinger (1977) that what teachers do is affected by what they think is one that has been repeated many times in the literature relating to teacher thinking. Teachers' perceptions (what they think) are unique to the individual, may be independent of notions of objective reality, and have been demonstrated in a range of fields to be significant influences on action, although the way in which they operate in influencing teacher participation in SBCD has not been not fully understood. A review of the literature relating to factors influencing teacher participation in SBCD (Bezzina, 1989) revealed that there was no coherent explanation of the ways in which the perceptions of teachers of themselves and their situations impacted on their participation in school based curriculum development (SBCD).

An earlier paper (Bezzina, 1988), based on a review of the literature in the fields of school based curriculum development and attitude-behaviour research, put forward a model for explaining teacher participation in SBCD which was based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985). This theory was considered to be acceptable as a basis for the exploration of the relationships under investigation as it was well supported in its

previous applications to a variety of social behaviours and was able to encompass the variables identified in the literature as likely to influence teacher participation in SBCD. Subsequent research validated a variation of the model originally proposed (Bezzina, 1989,1990)

In the resultant model (Figure 1), it was shown that teachers' participation in SBCD is influenced by their intention to participate. Intention is influenced by a latent variable described as general disposition to participate, which in turn is influenced by attitudes towards participation, perceptions of what significant others expected by way of participation (subjective norms), the teachers' own sense of what they ought to do (personal norms), their perceived opportunity to participate (perceived behavioural control- opportunity) and the extent to which they felt able to participate (perceived behavioural control- ability). The variables in this model provide a useful and coherent framework for the description of teachers' perceptions of their participation in SBCD. The present paper reports the findings related to the attitudes, personal and social norms regarding participation and the two perceived behavioural control variables - opportunity and ability.

FIGURE 1: MODEL FOR THE EXPLANATION OF TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN SBCD (BEZZINA, 1989).



The figure on each arrow is the path coefficient

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METHODOLOGY

Instruments

The complete survey research involved the construction and administration of a mail survey followed five weeks later by a telephone interview. The mail survey was used as a means to gather the necessary data about each of the components of the model to be tested, except for actual participation. The survey instrument (Teacher Participation in SBCD Questionnaire: TPSQ) was developed using procedures advocated by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) which involved developing response options for the TPSQ by means of a preliminary open-ended instrument (Teacher Participation in SBCD Preliminary Instrument: TPSP) administered to a separate sample of teachers from the same research population. This ensured that the options used were appropriate to the perceptions of practising teachers. The telephone interview (Teacher Participation in SBCD Interview: TPSI) was used to gather data about actual participation in SBCD from all respondents to the initial questionnaire, but the results of interviews are not treated in this paper. The Alpha coefficients of reliability for the various sub-scales of the TPSQ ranged from 0.64 to 0.97.

Sample

The survey sample comprised 82 randomly selected primary teachers in Catholic schools in a Sydney.Diocese These represented ten percent of the staff in all schools whose principals had agreed to participate in the study (51 percent of schools in the system). The final response rate was 82 percent (64 completed questionnaires). This response represented 59 different schools, 5 with 2 teachers responding (staff size between 15 and 34) and 1 with 3 teachers (staff size between 24 and 35). All the other schools contributed one teacher to the sample (Staff fewer than 15).

Data Analysis

For the purposes of this aspect of the study, the major analytic techniques were the examination of results for each component of each variable and the representation of each of the key variables as a single score. Based on the work of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), the **attitude** to a behaviour was considered to be based on beliefs about the likelihood of a range of individual outcomes and the evaluation of these outcomes. In mathematical terms the attitude towards participation in SBCD is calculated by multiplying the evaluation

rating and the likelihood rating for a list of possible outcomes and then taking the mean of these scores.

Similarly, **subjective norms** are seen to reflect the extent to which salient others are perceived to expect participation and the motivation to comply with these others. The overall subjective norm score is calculated by multiplying the ratings of expectation and motivation to comply for a list of salient others and then taking the mean of these scores.

Perceived behavioural control- opportunity was represented by the mean of the ratings of a number of organisational attributes as aids or barriers, and **perceived behavioural control- ability** was represented by the mean of the ratings of a number of personal attributes. **Personal norms** were measured directly as a rating of the extent to which the individual teacher felt he or she ought to participate in SBCD.

RESULTS

Attitudes, Evaluations and Likelihood of Outcomes

Table 1 provides the results for

(i) mean attitude ratings for each possible outcome of participation;
(ii) mean attitude rating for participation in general;
(iii) the percentage of respondents who perceived each outcome as likely; and
(iv) the percentage of respondents who evaluated each outcome positively.

Table 1 shows that teachers displayed attitudes which were generally positive towards their participation, both in terms of particular outcomes and overall. Only three of the fifteen outcomes included in the TPSQ received a negative attitude score. These all related to demands on time and energy, but on a scale from -9 to 9 cannot be considered to be strong reactions. Interestingly, the attitude towards diverting time from other priorities was more negative than that towards the actual amount of time taken. The outcomes which merited the most positive attitude ratings related to favourable impact on pupils, such as improved curriculum or better response to pupil needs. Teachers' attitudes towards better use of their existing abilities in the area of SBCD and towards the potential of SBCD to develop new skills and knowledge were positive, with very high percentages of respondents seeing these outcomes as likely and evaluating them positively. The overall picture which emerges is of a group of teachers positively disposed towards participation

in SBCD because of its benefits for students, while being concerned about the conflicting demands on time this creates.

TABLE 1: ATTITUDES, EVALUATIONS AND LIKELIHOOD RATINGS

Likely outcomes	Attitude (-9 to 9)	Percentage Evaluating Positively	Percentage Rating as Likely
Better response to pupil needs	4.06	97	86
Better use of existing staff expertise	3.61	94	83
Improved curriculum	3.23	100	78
Development of new staff skills and knowledge	3.21	81	79
Better use of existing resources	3.13	86	82
Flawed curriculum	3.10	12	17
Leads to disagreement and disunity	3.10	3	19
Increased staff cohesiveness and unity	2.64	92	81
Participation in decision making	2.20	86	77
Demands skills teachers do not have	1.63	14	25
Demands resources schools do not have	0.72	30	36
Puts teachers under stress	0.16	16	55
Some staff do all the work	-0.23	28	60
Takes a great deal of time	-0.37	36	81
Diverts time and energy from other priorities	-0.51	28	65
Overall attitude to participation in SBCD (Scale -9 to 9)	**2.08**		

Subjective Norms, Normative Beliefs and Motivation to Comply

The two components of the subjective norm were the rating of the extent to which the respondent thought the salient other wished them to participate (Normative belief) and the extent of motivation to comply with that wish. Table 2 provides the list of those people or groups which teachers considered to be salient in decisions about participation, the subjective norm score for each referent, the percentages of respondents who indicated that the referent thought they ought to participate and the percentage who were positively motivated to comply.

TABLE 2 SUBJECTIVE NORMS, NORMATIVE BELIEFS AND MOTIVATION TO COMPLY

Referent	Subjective Norm(-9 to 9)	Normative Belief*	Motivation to Comply*
The principal	5.50	88	98
Executive	4.08	87	91
Consultants	3.37	82	89
Other teachers	3.08	79	84
Parents of the pupils	1.68	72	58
Pupils	1.52	55	62
Members of the family	1.38	49	50

Overall subjective norm for participation in SBCD (Scale -9 to 9) **2.94**

*Normative Belief: Percentage of respondents indicating that referent thought they ought to participate in SBCD

*Motivation to Comply: Percentage of respondents indicating they would comply with referent's wishes.

The list of salient referents used in the TPSQ was generated in an earlier phase of the study from the responses of teachers to two open ended questions about influential people or groups who would or would not wish to see them participate in SBCD. Thus, the consistently positive subjective norm scores could not have been predicted on the basis of the referents in the list. All seven referents were seen as generally supporting participation - even the family, over which opinion was most divided. The fact that the rank orders for motivation to comply and normative belief were so similar indicates a clear heirarchy of influence which is reflected in the subjective norm scores. The general trend in the results was that the more strongly a person or group was perceived to think teachers ought to participate in SBCD, the more likely their wishes were to be complied with. Subjective norms seemed to cluster in three groups. By far the most influential was the principal, then other colleagues, and then non-professionals - perhaps mirroring decreasing levels of responsibility for SBCD.

Of particular interest in the current climate of advocacy for parental and student involvement is the fact that large percentages of respondents in each case (48% and 32% respectively) indicated that they would be unlikely to comply with the wishes of the parents in regard to their participation in SBCD.

Personal Norms

There was a single question regarding the extent to which respondents personally felt that they ought to participate in SBCD. This was scored on a scale from -3 to 3, and yielded an

overall mean of 1.66, indicating a general perception among respondents that SBCD was something in which they ought to be involved.

Perceived Behavioural Control - Ability.

Respondents rated each of nine personal attributes in terms of the extent to which they constituted an aid or barrier to their participation in SBCD. The results for each attribute on a scale from -3 to 3 are reported in Table 3 along with the mean score for this variable. The items listed in Table 3 resulted from the TPSP survey of practising teachers, and it is significant that the only skill identified by this group was that of working with others, and the only specific knowledge item was subject knowledge. The absence of other skill or knowledge items specifically related to SBCD practice may be a result of a clear perception that they are not important, or it may be that teachers are not equipped to identify appropriate elements of skill and knowledge.

TABLE 3: PERCEIVED BEHAVIOURAL CONTROL- ABILITY

Personal attribute	Mean Rating	Mean percentage rating as an aid
Experience as a teacher	1.69	91
Skills in working with others	1.64	93
Level of enthusiasm	1.52	82
Knowledge about the subject	1.34	79
Priority attached to SBCD	1.25	77
Confidence in SBCD ability	1.03	74
Formal study	0.78	66
Experience in SBCD	0.77	70
Inservice	0.37	57

Overall measure of perceived behavioural control- ability: **1.15**

The overall score for perceived behavioural control- ability indicated that participants generally felt able to participate in SBCD if they wished to. The ratings given to inservice, formal study and experience in SBCD were positive but very low. However, their interpretation is problematic, as we are unclear whether the weakness is in the quality or the quantity of the respective experiences. The case study data from another part of the study (Bezzina, 1989) indicated that despite considerable experience in SBCD, this experience in itself was not seen as an aid.

Perceived behavioural control- opportunity

Respondents rated each of eight organisational attributes in terms of the extent to which they constituted an aid or barrier to their participation in SBCD. The results for each attribute on a scale from -3 to 3, and the overall score for the variable are reported in Table 4. The items listed in Table 4 resulted from the TPSP survey of practising teachers.

TABLE 4: PERCEIVED BEHAVIOURAL CONTROL- OPPORTUNITY

Organisational Attribute	Mean Rating	Mean percentage rating as an aid
Principal/executive support	1.61	85
Level of staff expertise	1.18	83
School climate and staff relations	1.11	74
Clarity of direction	0.82	70
Level of staff interest and enthusiasm	0.80	70
External support and advice	0.73	65
Resources available	0.08	54
Time available	-1.10	26
Overall measure of perceived behavioural control- opportunity		**0.65**

Table 4 indicates that teachers perceived that conditions within their schools generally assisted them to participate in SBCD if they wished to. All organisational attributes identified as significant acted as aids in some way except for time, which was the fourth strongest rating in absolute terms, and was seen by 74% of respondents as a barrier to their participation. While resources received a marginally positive rating, 46% of respondents saw them as a barrier to participation.

There was a high level of perceived principal and executive support, linking to ealier findings on subjective norm (Table 2). Teachers also generally perceived their schools as being characterised by appropriate levels of expertise and suitable climates for SBCD. There was a less strong sense of clarity of direction or staff enthusiasm.

DISCUSSION

One of the interesting features of teacher perceptions in this study is that they were predominantly positive This is significant insofar as it runs counter both to the way in which teachers' perceptions are presented in documents related to recent NSW curriculum

reform, and to the expectations generated by much of the earlier research into teachers' perceptions of SBCD. The discussion which follows centres on the relationship between findings in this study, and those from previous research.

In discussing this study's description of teacher perceptions in relation to earlier SBCD literature, only key examples of relevant studies will be identified, since it is the general trend of previous research findings which is the object of comparison. A fuller discussion of the literature has been undertaken elsewhere (Bezzina, 1988, 1989).

Attitudes

Leithwood, et al. (1982) indicated that teacher attitudes would influence their participation in SBCD, a finding which was supported in the present study. However, research relating attitude to teacher participation in SBCD to date has been relatively unsophisticated in its treatment of the attitude construct - both in terms of the instruments used and the underlying theoretical base. The present research has addressed this criticism by adapting Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) which explains the underlying structure of attitude as the product of behavioural beliefs (likely outcomes of an action) and their evaluation. One of the implications of having adopted this approach was that the costs and benefits of participation identified in earlier research can be viewed as contrinuting to attitude as behavioural beliefs. These beliefs are now compared with those identified in the current research.

Earlier research into costs and benefits of participation in SBCD yielded outcomes which can be labelled as individual costs/benefits or organisational costs/benefits. None of the benefits to the individual which have been identified in other research was identified by teachers as a behavioural belief in their responses to the TPSP. Thus, satisfaction (Imber, 1983) and self-efficacy, ownership and improved career prospects (Duke, et al, 1983) were not included in the TPSQ instrument. The types of outcomes which teachers did rate as advantages in the current study were less self-centred, and included improved curriculum and better response to pupil needs. One interpretation of the results is that teachers identified with the organisational goals to such an extent that the achievement of outcomes which benefit the school was seen as a benefit to them, personally. Perhaps the sense of satisfaction adverted to elsewhere in the literature review was perceived by teachers as an outcome of the achievement of desirable goals rather than a direct outcome of participation in SBCD. It is significant that a focus on the source of teacher rewards, particularly as identified by Lortie (1975), was not significant among the open-ended responses to the TPSP and thus did not figure in the final questionnaire. It seems that

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these notions are not a part of the way in which teachers perceived their participation in SBCD in the present study. This difference may be a result of differences between American and Australian teachers, between the situations in which they work, or a result of the time which has elapsed between Lortie's work and the present study.

Claims by Cavanagh and Styles (1983) and Pitt and Jennings (1984), that stress was a cost of participation, and by Riley (1984), who identified demands on time and energy as a cost, were supported in the present research. Other costs were not sufficiently common among teachers' perceptions to warrant their inclusion in the TPSQ. Thus, changing roles, lack of reward, the loss of a sense of autonomy, threat to career advancement and increased responsibility were not included. It may be that some of the discussion of SBCD which took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s such as that of Duke, et al, (1980) and Morgan (1981), focussed on the changing demands on teachers, whereas for most of the teachers in the current study (modal experience 5 years, mean 9.2 years) SBCD had been a part of their experience all their working lives and did not represent change.

Subjective and personal norms

Subjective and personal norms are treated together because they both relate to teachers' perceptions of their role. The definition of role adopted involved the notion of expectation, which is central also to an understanding of subjective and personal norms. Prideaux (1983), and Beeson and Gunstone (1975) depicted teachers as seeing their role in curriculum development as peripheral. Fullan (1982) found that the majority of teachers preferred to take on roles as curriculum receivers rather than autonomous developers. From another perspective, the work of teachers has been described as isolated and classroom focussed, and thus antipathetic to enterprises such as SBCD (Hargreaves, 1981;Goodlad, 1984:187).

Role perception, as reflected in subjective and personal norms, was not found to be a barrier to participation in the present research. The claim in the previous section that participation in SBCD is no longer a new, or unusual expectation of teachers is substantiated by the strong, positive ratings of subjective norm attached, in particular, to teachers' professional colleagues. Even teachers' families, their pupils and the parents of their pupils yielded positive subjective norm scores, although these were much lower than those for colleagues. The importance of the role of the Principal as indicated by studies such as those by Cohen and Harrison, (1982), and Harrison (1981) is strongly

supported here, with the highest rating by far among the salient referents used in the study.

The results for personal norms also demonstrate a perception that teachers personally felt that they ought to participate in SBCD . Thus, for teachers in this sample, there was a positive perception of the their role in SBCD. They felt that they ought to participate, both personally, and as a result of the expectations of others, a result which stands in contrast to the findings of the earlier research. Once again, it seems that the passage of time, with the accompanying familiarisation of teachers with SBCD, may have resulted in a change in teachers' perceptions of their participation.

Perceived behavioural control - ability

Skilbeck (1984) and Brady (1987) point to the level of teacher skill as a likely influence on teacher participation in SBCD. Nettle (1981) identifies it as a likely barrier to participation. This directly relates to results for perceived behavioural control :bility. Once again, the results from the present study run counter to the expectations raised by the literature. Even though teachers identified a range of control beliefs which seemed to have little to do with specific SBCD skills, and did not rate their confidence in SBCD highly among other attributes, the overall perception of ability was quite positive. Increased exposure to SBCD and attention to it in teacher education programs in the time between earlier research and this study may account for this difference.

Perceived behavioural control-opportunity

Perceived behavioural control-opportunity relates most directly to the organisational aids and barriers identified in the literature. Examples of these were the organisational structure of the school, the role of the principal and the executive and time(Cohen and Harrison, 1982). Teacher perceptions in this study confirmed earlier findings about the importance of time and resources and the significant role of the Principal for SBCD. On the other hand, where the literature indicated that organisational structure of schools would most likely act as a barrier to participation, this was not necessarily the case in the present study. Factors which figured strongly in the present study were, rather, school

climate and staff relations. Once again, the perceptions of the teachers in the current study are more positive than the literature would have indicated they might be.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that the more pessimistic descriptions of the earlier research and recent curriculum statements in NSW apply to some of the teachers in the present sample. The use of aggregated figures can mask the fact that there were numbers of teachers whose perceptions of each variable were negative. Taken as a group, however, the sample of teachers in Primary schools in this study can be characterised as having quite positive perceptions. These perceptions may reflect the fact that the majority of teachers in the sample can now be described as 'extended professionals' (Hoyle, 1972). One of the implications of this is that initiatives which are appropriately supported by time and resources at the school level within this system have a reasonable probability of involving teachers.

If the differences between the results of this study and some earlier findings reflect a change in teacher perceptions, then the study should sound a warning about the implications for teacher professionalism of recent moves towards the recentralisation of curriculum development in NSW. For these teachers at least, the difficulties of SBCD were organisational rather than personal, but were still worth overcoming. With increasing attention to the implementation of central curriculum, and the added work necessary to administer the newly devolved financial responsibilities (with little by way of additional resources to support this), there would seem to be less likelihood of teachers having the opportunities to exercise hard won skills. In the early days of SBCD it could be said that teachers <u>were</u> free as a result of policy on curriculum development, but they certainly did not <u>feel</u> free because of their initial lack of training, skills and expertise in many cases. Now that they might feel free to participate in SBCD having acquired the necessary skills, the opporunity to exercise them is disappearing. The consequences of this development are dire. Apple and Teitlebaum (1986) have warned about the dangers of deskilling the profession through restricting the exercise of skills:

> The changing structures of the control of teachers' work in areas somewhat removed from the corridors and classrooms of schools will have significant implications as to whether the content and pedagogy of our schools will have any critical bite at all.

This may very well be the path down which NSW teachers are heading.

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